

11-14-1997

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Recommended Citation

"Finding More Organ Donors Depends on a Change in Persuasion Strategies, According to UD Researchers" (1997). *News Releases*. 8119.

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Nov. 14, 1997
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**FINDING MORE ORGAN DONORS DEPENDS ON A CHANGE
IN PERSUASION STRATEGIES, ACCORDING TO UD RESEARCHERS**

DAYTON, Ohio — A recent study by University of Dayton researchers shows that there is a more effective way to persuade people to become organ donors.

Forget about using fear appeals and focus on making people feel good about helping others, says the study.

The findings of a survey done by former UD graduate student Nita Sanil along with Teresa Thompson and Louis Cusella, professors of communication at UD, will be presented by Thompson at the National Communication Association annual convention in Chicago on Friday, Nov. 21.

Sanil began studying the persuasion strategies used to encourage organ donors because of her own personal involvement in the problem. Her brother, age 31 and living in India, is in need of a kidney transplant. "In India the problem is even worse," Sanil said. "This is a real issue and not just in the U.S. — it's a global problem," said Sanil, who now works for Franz Inc., a computer software company in California.

According to the Journal of the American Medical Association, nearly 35,000 people were on the national waiting list for organ transplantation in April 1994, and with increased demand that number grows by several hundred every month. The same research shows that only about one quarter of Americans have signed an organ donor card. When death is imminent, this can put the burden of making a organ donor decision on the family during what is usually a stressful and emotional time.

Many of the previous communication strategies used to convince potential donors have focused on either fear appeals such as, "you're never too young to think about your death" or the straightforward communication of facts, say the UD researchers. Their study shows that a more persuasive approach is to use messages that focus on positive appeals that elicit empathy and compassion for the person in need.

The survey included 162 people who responded to one of four different persuasive

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strategies — two strategies used fear appeals and two used positive appeals.

Of the 162 surveyed, 87 percent agreed that there is a shortage of organ donors. While 57 percent had previously decided to be an organ donor, 41 percent had either decided not to be a donor or were undecided.

The survey showed that 24 percent of those who received the fear appeals said they did not plan to donate their organs. Only 5 percent of those receiving the positive appeal made the same statement.

Thompson said many people who are hesitant to consider organ donation quickly change their minds when they have a family member in need. "This a position that any of us could be in at any time, but there are so many people who are reluctant to be donors," she said. "As I talk to people, I am always surprised by the lack of rationality of their reasoning."

Considering organ donation requires that people think about their own mortality, Thompson said. According to the study, some people cited a fear that they will be allowed to die early so their organs can be used for transplant.

"When someone hears a message like 'you better donate your organs or someone will die,' it's perceived as a threat and they don't feel good about it," Sanil said. However, when people receive a message that makes them feel good about themselves, they're more likely to become donors, she said. "When you draw attention away from the fact that they're not going to be alive when they donate an organ, you are in a better position to make them feel good about becoming a donor."

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For media interviews, call **Teresa Thompson** at (937) 229-2379 or in Chicago on Nov. 20-21 at the Chicago Hilton and Towers at (312) 922-4400. Call **Nita Sanil** in California at (408) 573-1122. For more information, call **Erika Mattingly** at (937) 229-3212.